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ABSTRACT

In spite of the large amount of work done by other psychologists on peace issues, organizational psychologists have not been using the knowledge and methods of their field to help peace organizations. Organizational psychologists could contribute to peace organizations by studying research questions of concern to peace groups and by examining career patterns of peace activists, activist burnout and burnout prevention, and peace group effectiveness. Organizational psychologists could help peace groups through organization development training or career counseling. At the same time, organizational psychology has much to learn from working with peace groups. The field of organizational psychology can learn about decision making in large democratic organizations from innovative peace groups such as "Beyond War," which makes decisions in large groups spread out over the country which simultaneously communicate via video. Organizational psychology can learn about motivation through common vision from peace groups where many workers are extremely motivated by the organization's mission, even in the absence of pay. Also, studies of organizations (such as peace groups) that are anomalous in terms of existing theory have led to innovative and broader theories of organizational effectiveness. There is a need for organizational psychologists to become involved in the peace movement. (NB)

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Organizational Psychology and the Peace Movement

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ABSTRACT

Organizational Psychology and the Peace Movement

by Donald W. McCormick

This paper discusses some of what peace organizations can learn from organizational psychology (OP) and vice versa.

In the history of psychologists working on peace issues, the role of OP was notably absent. How can OP help the peace movement? It can help through research and intervention in peace organizations.

OP can study research questions of concern to peace groups. Organizational psychologists can help peace groups through organization development training, or career counseling. The field of OP can learn about decision making in large democratic organizations from innovative peace groups such as "Beyond War", which makes decisions in large groups spread out over the country which simultaneously communicate via video. OP can learn about motivation through common vision from peace groups where many workers are extremely motivated by the organization's mission, even in the absence of pay. Also, studies of organizations (such as peace groups) that are anomalous in terms of existing theory have led to innovative and broader theories of organizational effectiveness.

The paper ends with a discussion of the need for OP to become involved in the peace movement.

Organizational Psychology and the Peace Movement

How can organizational psychology help peace organizations, and what do peace organizations have to offer organizational psychology?

So far, organizational psychologists have not been using the knowledge and methods of their field to help peace organizations. In Jacobs' (1986) extensive history of psychologists working on peace issues, the role of organizational psychology was primarily noticeable by its absence. This is true despite the large amount of work done by other psychologists on peace issues (Jacobs, 1986). Individual organizational psychologists, such as Rensis Likert (Morawski & Goldstein, 1985), have been involved in peace work, but their work has nothing to do with how peace organizations function.

Other psychologists have played many roles with regards to the threat of nuclear war. Some psychologists' research focuses on the application of conflict resolution methods to the nuclear arms race (Deutsch, 1980). Janis (1982) is interested in the appliying his group decision making work to policy decisions regarding nuclear issues. Other psychologists study the psychological effect of the threat of nuclear war.

Organizational psychologists, however, are uniquely qualified to help via a largely unexplored role--that of <u>serving the organizations that work for peace</u>. They can help through research and intervention.

Organizational psychology <u>research</u> can find the answers to questions of concern to peace groups--questions such as:

o What are the career patterns of peace activists? Describing peace activists' career paths and sharing these descriptions with

persons who are interested in peace work may encourage those who are unsure about working for peace as a career. For example, I told a clinical psychology student that I was interested in consulting to peace and social change organizations and she said that she would much prefer that kind of consulting to clinical work, but did not know that it was even possible.

o What can be done to prevent burnout of peace activists?

o How does the way peace groups are perceived by the organizations they seek to change influence their effectiveness?

o What strategies do the more successful peace groups use?

o How can peace groups understand and gauge their effectiveness? What does "organizational effectiveness" even mean to a peace group? I wrote a research proposal that focused on discovering characteristics of effective peace organizations--an In Search of Excellence (Peters & Waterman, 1982) for peace organizations. When I mentioned the research to consultants to or members of peace organizations, they often said "Well, what do you mean by an effective peace organization?" or "It can't be defined". A good definition of organizational effectiveness for a peace organization can guide managers in their choices of strategy and organization. Imagine trying to improve the management of an organization without having an idea of how effective it is (and despairing at even the possibility of ever having such an idea). Or imagine working at the community level while the benchmark for your success is a global goal such as nuclear disarmament. Defining effectiveness may help managers and members of peace organizations gain a better idea of what they are

doing and whether they are doing it well.

Organizational psychologists can also help peace groups through intervention. The field of organizational psychology has a vast arsenal (if you forgive the military metaphor) of interventions with which to help peace groups. These include organization development interventions (such as open systems planning or survey feedback), training interventions (training in consensus decision making, group problem solving, or supervisory skills), or career counseling for those making "vocational choices or economically expensive life transitions in order to foster peace" (Nelson, 1985).

Related professional associations such as the Organization Development Network and the American Society for Training and Development often have local divisions and committees that arrange for volunteer professionals to serve community organizations. Similarly, management consulting and training firms that specialize in serving nonprofit organizations (for example, The Support Center or the Southern California Center for Nonprofit Management) often use volunteers in their consulting projects and workshops. Organizational psychologists could use these as a base to approach and help peace organizations.

We have discussed a little about what organizational psychologists can do for peace organizations, the second question in this paper is "What can organizational psychology gain from studying peace groups?" Certain peace groups are very good at some things and we can learn from them.

One area in which peace groups stand out is the management of

democratic organizations. As workplace democratization and employee participation increase, we can gain insight from the methods of some of the profoundly democratic organizations in the peace movement. Rosabeth Kanter, after all, started her career by studying commitment in deeply democratic organizations --communes. Peace organizations are often driven by ideology to experiment with democratic forms that are far beyond what the average business organization would try.

Decision making in a democratic organization is problematic, and the organization "Beyond War" provides a good example of a way to manage it. "Beyond War" is a 10,000 member organization where decisions are made by consensus. In addition, a great deal of strategy comes from the ground up. The smallest unit is the team, which operates on a neighborhood level. Then comes the region, an example of which might be West Los Angeles. The next larger unit is the territory -Southern California is a territory. Finally there is the national level. As an example of democratic decision making, suppose a member of a neighborhood team in Beyond War decides it would be a good idea to run an ad in a newspaper in order to influence people's thinking about war. First the local team would have to reach a consensus as to whether or not that was a good idea. Suppose they agree, then the team representatives in the region would have to meet and come to a consensus. If it was something that can be implemented locally, it would be done. If it has larger implications, the consensus decision making process may move up to the territory level or a national level where a board of reperesentatives from the

next lower level would decide by consensus. Beyond War also uses video teleconferencing and electronic mail to allow large numbers of its members across the country to simultaneously communicate and make consensus (and sometimes majority vote) decisions. This process is, of course, more time consuming than traditional decision making. But this bottom up, consensus based decision-making and policy process is interesting and could be a rich source of learning about participative and democratic processes in organizations.

Motivation through common vision is another area in which the field of organizational psychology can learn from peace organizations. In many peace organizations, workers are extremely motivated by the organization's mission. Vision as a source of motivation is an increasingly popular topic in both the academic and popular literature (Berlew, 1984; Peters & Waterman, 1982), and peace organizations offer an opportunity to see how powerful mission and task significance can serve as a motivator, even in the absence of much or any pay. For example, in the Great Peace March, people were motivated to walk across the entire United States. If your employer asked you to walk across the US, would you do it?

Examining unusual organizations that are anomalous in terms of existing theory has led to innovative and broader theories. For example, Gaertner and Ramnarayan's (1983) study of EPA led them to a new definition of organizational effectiveness. Studies of organizations (such as peace groups) that are anomalous in terms of existing theory have led to innovative and broader theories.

But even if you do not accept the idea that the field of

organizational psychology can benefit from studying peace organizations, I still believe that organizational psychologists should become more involved in helping peace groups. If you accept that peace organizations are going about peacemaking in the right manner, then what organizations are more important for organizational psychologists to help than those concerned with avoiding slaughter? I do not believe there are many. Peace organizations offer an arena for organizational psychologists to perform very meaningful work--work that Hackman and Oldham (1980) would describe as being very high in "task significance". After all, prevention of nuclear war is both "the ultimate psychological issue" (Caldicott, 1984) and the ultimate organizational issue--hence the ultimate issue in organizational psychology.

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